

Message Text

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SUBJECT: WATER, POWER AND CROP SITUATION IN BAHAWALPUR

REF: LAHORE 1604

1. DURING INTRODUCTORY TOUR OF BAHAWALPUR DIVISION DEC 1-5, I DREW FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS RE CURRENT WATER, POWER AND CROP SITUATION IN THESE AGRICULTURALLY-SIGNIFICANT BOONDOCKS OF PUNJAB. CONCLUSIONS BEAR OUT, THROUGH CLOSE FOCUS, THRUST OF OUR REPORTING OVER PAST FOUR MONTHS RE ADVANCING WATER AND POWER CRISIS IN PUNJAB AND ITS ADVERSE IMPLICATIONS FOR AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION. (OTHER SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS OF TOUR -- INDUSTRIAL SITUATION, "SERAIKI" LINGUISTIC SEPARATISM, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS -- BEING REPORTED BY AIRGRAM.)

2. LAY OF LAND: THREE DISTRICTS OF DIVISION -- BAHAWALNAGAR, BAHAWALPUR, AND RAHIM YAR KHAN -- STRETCH 300 MILES ALONG LEFT BANK OF SUTLEJ-PANJNAD-INDUS WATERCOURSE SOUTHEAST TO

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INDIAN BORDER. SOUTHEASTERN THREE-FIFTHS ARE CHOLISTAN DESERT.

CULTIVABLE AREA LIES IN THREE PARALLEL ZONES: (1) "BARANI" (I.E., NON-IRRIGATED) RIVERINE STRIP CULTIVATED WITH NATURAL MOISTURE IN SOIL PLUS OCCASIONAL RAINFALL; (2) "NON-PERENNIAL" (CANAL-IRRIGATED SUMMER ONLY) ZONE INLAND OF BARANI; AND (3) "PERENNIAL" (IRRIGATED YEARROUND) AREAS BORDERING DESERT. GROUNDWATER IS SWEET IN NON-PERENNIAL AREA AND BRACKISH IN PERENNIAL AND DESERT AREAS, EXPLAINING IRRIGATION PATTERN. (CURIOUSLY, NORTHWEST RAILWAY, BUILT IN 19TH CENTURY AND ONLY LINK BETWEEN KARACHI AND PUNJAB, IS ALIGNED EXACTLY BETWEEN PERENNIAL AND NON-PERENNIAL ZONES.)

3. DIVISION'S POPULATION HAS INCREASED FROM 2.57 MILLION IN 1961 TO 3.53 MILLION 1972 WITH HIGH ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF 3.4 PERCENT -- ATTRIBUTABLE PARTLY TO IMMIGRATION OF PUNJABI SETTLERS ON RECLAIMED LANDS. PRESSURE ON LAND IS HEAVY WITH ABOUT 500 PERSONS PER ARABLE SQUARE MILE.

4. WATER SITUATION: SPEAKING FOR DIVISION AS WHOLE, COMMISSIONER A.K. KHALID TERMED PREVAILING WATER SHORTAGE "ACUTE," CLAIMED RECENT "KHARIF" (SUMMER CROP) SEASON STARTED WITH ONLY 80-90 PERCENT NORMAL WATER SUPPLY AND ENDED WITH ONLY 60 PERCENT. NON-PERENNIAL CANAL SYSTEM NOW BONE-DRY (CONFIRMED BY OBSERVATION) AND WATER IN PERENNIAL SYSTEM GREATLY REDUCED BY LOW FLOW OF SUTLEJ.

5. BY DISTRICT, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER (DC) BAHAWALPUR ESTIMATED CURRENT WATER SUPPLY -- AT CRITICAL RABI (WINTER CROP) PLANTING TIME -- RUNNING HARDLY 50 PERCENT OF NORMAL, WITH PRECIOUS SUPPLY BEING RELEASED TO FARMERS "TURN BY TURN" TO PERMIT AS MUCH PLANTING AS POSSIBLE. DC/RAHIM YAR KHAN PUT IRRIGATION WATER SUPPLY AT HARDLY HALF NORMAL, WITH IMPORTANT NON-PERENNIAL PANJNAD CANAL RUNNING ONLY 700 CUSECS VERSUS NORMAL RABI SEASON LEVEL OF 2,800 AND CAPACITY OF 9,600. DC/BAHAWALNAGAR ALSO ESTIMATED CURRENT CANAL WATER SUPPLY AT HALF NORMAL AMOUNT, ALL FROM SULEMANKI HEADWORKS WHICH IN TURN DEPENDS LARGELY ON RELEASES FROM HARD-PRESSED MANGLA DAM.

6. 6. TUBEWELL SITUATION: ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL REPORT PREPARED BY COMMISSIONER FOR PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO LAST MONTH, ONLY ABOUT 60 PERCENT OF 7,200 TUBEWELLS IN DIVISION ARE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MECHANICALLY OPERABLE. MOST TUBEWELLS NATURALLY IN HANDS OF MORE AFFLUENT FARMERS. LATTER COMPLAIN OF INADEQUATE ELECTRICITY SUPPLY AND PROHIBITIVELY HIGH COST OF DIESEL FUEL. AS CONSEQUENCE, ONLY FRACTION OF AVAILABLE TUBEWELLS APPEAR ACTIVE IN SUPPLEMENTING MEAGRE CANAL WATER SUPPLIES. DIVISION HAS NO SCARP PROJECT, THOUGH PRIMIN HAS PROMISED NEXT ONE (PRESUMABLY NUMBER SIX) TO BAHAWALNAGAR DISTRICT.

7. LAST KHARIF CROP: DIVISION CONCENTRATES ON COTTON AND SUGAR CANE AS SUMMER CROPS, WITH COTTON LEADING IN RAHIM YAR KHAN, CANE IN BAHAWALNAGAR, AND BAHAWALPUR MIXED. RAHIM YAR KHAN RANKS AS THIRD LARGEST COTTON PRODUCING DISTRICT OF PUNJAB. COMMISSIONER KHALID OPINED KHARIF CROPS WERE ONLY ABOUT 70 PERCENT OF NORMAL DUE TO INADEQUATE WATERING AT MATURING TIME AND SOME INFESTATION OF COTTON CROP. RAHIM YAR KHAN OFFICIALS BELIEVED COTTON YIELD DOWN ABOUT 40 PERCENT THERE, DUE MAINLY TO WHITE FLY PROBLEM, AND SUGAR CANE YIELD REDUCED BY DROUGHT. COTTON, PICKED THREE TIMES EACH SEASON, IS NOW IN SECOND PICKING, AND LATE.

8. RABI PLANTING: WHEAT DOMINATES RABI SEASON, NOW BEGUN. COMMISSIONER KHALID CONSIDERED OUTLOOK PRECARIOUS WITH DIVISION "LUCKY TO GET 60 PERCENT OF NORMAL WHEAT CROP." (COMMENT: DIVISION ACCOUNTED FOR 488,500 TONS OF WHEAT LAST SPRING, REPORTEDLY SUPPLYING OVER 150,000 TONS TO GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT, PARTLY FOR LOCAL URBAN RATIONING AND PARTLY FOR SUPPLY OUTSIDE DIVISION. THUS IT COULD BECOME DEFICIT AREA THIS SEASON.)

9. DISTRICTS REPORTED VARYING DELAYS AND SHORTFALLS IN RABI PLANTING. DC/BAHAWALPUR ESTIMATED ONLY 30-35 PERCENT OF PROJECTED WHEAT PLANTED THUS FAR, WITH HOPES FOR 70 PERCENT NORMAL CROP IF AS MUCH AS 50 PERCENT USUAL WATER AVAILABLE. RAHIM YAR KHAN OFFICIALS BELIEVED 85 PERCENT OF PERENNIAL AREA AND 70 PERCENT NON-PERENNIAL AREA ALREADY SOWN TO WHEAT, BUT ONLY 50-60 PERCENT NORMAL CROP EXPECTED, WITH FARMER JC "PRAYING FOR RAINS BY JANUARY." DC/BAHAWALNAGAR COULD ONLY FORESEE HALF NORMAL WHEAT CROP; OPINED THAT 70,000 TONS SURPLUS LAST YEAR WOULD BECOME DEFICIT NEXT. NONE OF RECENT SCATTERED RAINS FELL IN BAHAWALPUR AND AREA HAD SEEN NO INCREASE IN CANAL WATER AS OF DECEMBER 5.
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10. ELECTRICITY: DIVISION PRODUCES NO ELECTRICITY AND IS AT END OF NORTHERN GRID LINE. ELECTRICAL SUPPLY ALREADY CURTAINED (TEMPORARY BLACKOUTS OCCURED DURING VISITS BOTH BAHAWALPUR AND RAHIM YAR KHAN) AND POWER "SHEDDING" WIDELY EXPECTED BY MID-DECEMBER. MOST SERIOUS IMMEDIATE EFFECT WOULD BE ON COTTON GINNING FACTORIES AND OPERABLE TUBEWELLS.

1. COMMENTS: FOREGOING CONFIRMS IN DETAIL, AT LEAST FOR ONE SECTION OF PUNJAB, OUR RECENT REPORTING ON CRITICAL WATER-POWER-AGRICULTURE SITUATION LOOMING IN THIS POPULOUS PROVINCE (REFTEL AND PREVIOUS). LOCAL AND PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS, OF COURSE, COULD BE EXAGGERATING FOR EFFECT, BUT I TOOK CARE TO CHECK OUT AS MANY OF THESE ALLEGATIONS AS POSSIBLE ON GROUND AND WITH NON-OFFICIALS, AND FOUND THEM EVIDENTLY ACCURATE.

CONCLUSION IS OBVIOUS THAT IF CURRENT CONDITIONS PERSIST,
REGION MAY WELL FALL FAR SHORT OF NORMAL RABI FOOD CROP AND
REQUIRE SUBSTANTIAL INPUT OF FOOD GRAINS FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES
BY NEXT SUMMER.
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